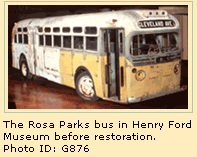
On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old African American woman who worked as a seamstress, boarded this Montgomery City bus to go home from work. On this bus on that day, Rosa Parks initiated a new era in the American quest for freedom and equality.

She sat near the middle of the bus, just behind the 10 seats reserved for whites. Soon all of the seats in the bus were filled. When a white man entered the bus, the driver (following the standard practice of segregation) insisted that all four blacks sitting just behind the white section give up their seats so that the man could sit there. Mrs. Parks, who was an active member of the local NAACP, quietly refused to give up her seat.

Her action was spontaneous and not pre-meditated, although her previous civil rights involvement and strong sense of justice were obvious influences. "When I made that decision," she said later, “I knew that I had the strength of my ancestors with me.”

[[](http://www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/rosaparks/story.asp)](http://www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/rosaparks/story.asp)She was arrested and convicted of violating the laws of segregation, known as “Jim Crow laws.” Mrs. Parks appealed her conviction and thus formally challenged the legality of segregation.

At the same time, local civil rights activists initiated a boycott of the Montgomery bus system. In cities across the South, segregated bus companies were daily reminders of the inequities of American society. Since African Americans made up about 75 percent of the riders in Montgomery, the boycott posed a serious economic threat to the company and a social threat to white rule in the city.

A group named the Montgomery Improvement Association, composed of local activists and ministers, organized the boycott. As their leader, they chose a young Baptist minister who was new to Montgomery: Martin Luther King, Jr. Sparked by Mrs. Parks’ action, the boycott lasted 381 days, into December 1956 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the segregation law was unconstitutional and the Montgomery buses were integrated. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was the beginning of a revolutionary era of non-violent mass protests in support of civil rights in the United States.

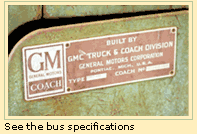
It was not just an accident that the civil rights movement began on a city bus. In a famous 1896 case involving a black man on a train, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court enunciated the “separate but equal” rationale for Jim Crow. Of course, facilities and treatment were never equal.

Under Jim Crow customs and laws, it was relatively easy to separate the races in every area of life except transportation. Bus and train companies couldn’t afford separate cars and so blacks and whites had to occupy the same space.

Thus, transportation was one the most volatile arenas for race relations in the South. Mrs. Parks remembers going to elementary school in Pine Level, Alabama, where buses took white kids to the new school but black kids had to walk to their school.

“I'd see the bus pass every day,” she said. “But to me, that was a way of life; we had no choice but to accept what was the custom. *The bus was among the first ways I realized there was a black world and a white world*” (emphasis added).

Montgomery’s Jim Crow customs were particularly harsh and gave bus drivers great latitude in making decisions on where people could sit. The law even gave bus drivers the authority to carry guns to enforce their edicts. Mrs. Parks’ attorney Fred Gray remembered, “Virtually every African-American person in Montgomery had some negative experience with the buses. But we had no choice. We had to use the buses for transportation.”

Civil rights advocates had outlawed Jim Crow in interstate train travel, and blacks in several Southern cities attacked the practice of segregated[[](http://www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/rosaparks/story.asp)](http://www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/rosaparks/story.asp)bus systems. There had been a bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1953, but black leaders compromised before making real gains. Joann Robinson, a black university professor and activist in Montgomery, had suggested the idea of a bus boycott months before the Parks arrest.

Two other women had been arrested on buses in Montgomery before Parks and were considered by black leaders as potential clients for challenging the law. However, both were rejected because black leaders felt they would not gain white support. When she heard that the well-respected Rosa Parks had been arrested, one Montgomery African American woman exclaimed, “They’ve messed with the wrong one now.”

In the South, city buses were lightning rods for civil rights activists. It took someone with the courage and character of Rosa Parks to strike with lightning. And it required the commitment of the entire African American community to fan the flames ignited by that lightning into the fires of the civil rights revolution.

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| |  | | --- | | **Dreams** | | |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | | |  |  | |  | | |  |  | |  | | |  |  | |  | | |  |  | |  | | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Hold fast to dreams For if dreams die Life is a broken-winged bird That cannot fly. Hold fast to dreams For when dreams go Life is a barren field Frozen with snow.   Langston Hughes | |

In this poem, Langston Hughes encourages the reader to hold onto his or her dreams. Ask students *What kinds of dreams do you think the author of the poem had? Do you think this poem could be talking to other people about their dreams too? Does it "speak" to you about the dreams you have in life?*While Hughes is clearly urging black people to keep dreaming -- not to give up their dreams of true freedom and equality -- the poem could be inspiring to all dreamers as it encourages them to never give up on their dreams.

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| |  | | --- | | **I, Too** | |  |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | I, too, sing America.  I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen When company comes, But I laugh, And eat well, And grow strong.  Tomorrow, I'll be at the table When company comes. Nobody'll dare Say to me, "Eat in the kitchen," Then.  Besides, They'll see how beautiful I am And be ashamed--  I, too, am America.   Langston Hughes  In this poem, Hughes shares the dream that many black people had at the turn of the last century and beyond: the dream that one day there would be no separation of the races, that all people would be "at the table" and looked at in the same way. The black man or woman in the poem dreams and sings about an "America" *("My country tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing…")*just like white people do; but just singing words about liberty does not necessarily make it so. Talk about Hughes' powerful words. Talk about the first and second full stanzas, which compare the America the poet lives in and the America of his or her dreams. Ask *Does the poet have faith that one day America might be a place of true equality?* | |

**Born:** February 1, 1902  
**Died:** May 22, 1967

Langston Hughes was one of the most important writers and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, which was the African American artistic movement in the 1920s that celebrated black life and culture. Hughes's creative genius was influenced by his life in New York City's Harlem, a primarily African American neighborhood. His literary works helped shape American literature and politics. Hughes, like others active in the Harlem Renaissance, had a strong sense of racial pride. Through his poetry, novels, plays, essays, and children's books, he promoted equality, condemned racism and injustice, and celebrated African American culture, humor, and spirituality.

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri to two bookkeepers. His parents separated when he was very young. His father moved to Mexico, and his mother left him for long periods of time in search of steady employment. Hughes's grandmother raised him in Lawrence, Kansas, until he was 12, when he moved to Illinois to live with his mother and stepfather. The family later moved to Ohio. From these humble origins, Langston developed a deep admiration for those he called "low-down folks," poor people who had a strong sense of emotion and pride. How do you think Hughes expressed these feelings?

Hughes began writing poetry in high school. He gained some early recognition and support among important black intellectuals such as James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B DuBois (also an "Amazing American"). While working as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C., Hughes gave three of his poems to Vachel Lindsay, a famous critic. Lindsay's enthusiastic praise won Hughes an even wider audience.  
Have you ever written a poem? What was its subject?

Many people write poems about experiences or feelings they've had. Hughes spent the summers of 1919 and 1920 with his father in Mexico. While on a train on his second trip, he wrote his first great poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." The poem was published in *The Crisis*, a magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. You may ask your librarian how to find this poem so that you can read it. Here's how it begins: *I've known rivers:/I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.*

Langston Hughes is one of America's greatest poets. Like so many writers, he wrote about what he knew -- the people, places and events around him. Although Hughes was friendly with people from all walks of life, the rich, the middle class and the poor, it was the people he called the "low-down folks" who had the greatest influence on his poetry. Hughes used this expression as a form of praise. He admired these people because "they accept what beauty is their own without question." What do you think this means?

Perhaps the phrase means that the low-down folks appreciated the beauty that existed in their lives. Hughes loved the music of his people, especially the blues, songs that express sad themes. He heard this music in clubs in Chicago, New York, Kansas City and Washington, D.C. The songs he heard were about people who were determined to overcome hardships. In "Songs Called the Blues" (1941), Hughes said this music was sung by "black, beaten but unbeatable throats." In 1958, Hughes recorded his poetry to the accompaniment of the music of jazz and blues artists such as Charles Mingus. Have you ever heard poetry recited to music?

Langston Hughes believed in using his art to get across his feelings about politics and injustice. He traveled to other countries to learn how they dealt with racial issues. Despite his own very liberal beliefs, Hughes defended African American activists who held more conservative views. For example, in the 1941 poem "Ballad of Booker T.," Hughes defends Booker T. Washington, a former slave and more conservative advocate for equality. Rather than criticize him, the poet focused on Washington's strategy to gain racial equality:  
  
"Sometimes he had  
compromise in his talk--  
for a man must crawl  
before he can walk  
and in Alabama in '85  
a joker was lucky  
to be alive."  
  
Hughes explained Washington's position by saying he had to "compromise." Have you ever had to compromise, or change your point of view, to get what you wanted?

1. *Freedom's Journal;* 2. Maggie Lena Walker; 3. Vermont; 4. Nat King Cole; 5. William, son of Antoney and Isabell; 6. Henry Blair; 7. Charles Cooper, "Sweetwater" Nat Clifton; 8. DeHart Hubbard; 9. Jupiter Hammon; 10. Hattie McDaniel; 11. Guion Steward Bluford Jr.; 12. Washington, D.C.; 13. Dr. Daniel Hale Williams; 14. Chicago, Illinois; 15. Ralph J. Bunche.

Answers to the worksheet

 **More Facts to Share**

You might share these additional facts with students after they have read this week’s news story.

 Jackie Robinson was born in Cairo, Georgia, on January 31, 1919. He was the youngest of five children. The next year, after his father abandoned the family, Jackie’s mother moved him and his siblings to Pasadena, California. The family was poor, and Jackie even joined a gang at one point in his life. With the help of a family friend and involvement in sports, though, Jackie turned around his life.

 Historians say that World War II helped pave the way for blacks to play in the major leagues. Blacks had played an integral part in America’s victory in the war. Sports historians say that some baseball team owners saw the untapped talent in the Negro Leagues as the key to winning a pennant. The team that took the courageous step of signing talented black players might have the best shot at beating the Yankees, who had been winning the pennant year after year.

 As the story goes, Dodgers’ owner Branch Rickey called Jackie Robinson into his office to talk about joining the team. At that meeting, Rickey purposely said many nasty things to Robinson -- the kinds of things Robinson would hear if he chose to be the first black player in the league. Rickey told Robinson that he would have to put up with that kind of talk. To that, Robinson reportedly asked, "Well, Mr. Rickey, do you want a player who doesn't have the guts to fight back?" Branch Rickey replied, "Jackie, how about a ballplayer with the guts *not* to fight back?" Indeed, as history would report, having the courage *not* to fight back would be one of the true measures of Robinson’s courage and greatness.

 Before he joined the Dodgers’ major league team, Jackie Robinson had played a season on their minor league team in Montreal. He led that league in batting average and fielding.

 That first year in Brooklyn was a rough one for Jackie. Fans and opposing players would taunt and harass him. Even some of his own teammates threatened to sit out rather than play alongside him. Wisely, Dodger management took a strong stand. They informed players who sat out that they would need to find new jobs.

 In one game early in the season, Philadelphia Phillies’ players and their manager shouted insults at Robinson. Those games against the Phillies did more to unite the Dodger players than anything else, Rickey would later recall.

 Pee Wee Reese, the white shortstop who played alongside Robinson, became one his best friends. During one early-season game in 1947, when Robinson was being heckled by fans in Cincinnati, Reese went over and put his arm around Robinson. That quiet gesture made a huge statement to the fans in the stands, and to the world.

 Hank Greenberg, a player on the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1947, made it a point to give Jackie a public welcome to the big leagues. Greenberg, a Jewish player, recalled being badly treated in his early days because of his religion; fans would often shout anti-Semitic remarks at him.

 In Robinson’s first year in the majors, he played 151 games, hit .297, and led the league in stolen bases. At the end of the season, he was named Rookie of the Year. Two years later he would earn the title of Most Valuable Player (MVP) in the National League.

 As Robinson’s career progressed, he became a fan favorite. More important, his presence stood as a symbol of hope to millions of African Americans. He played his entire career, which spanned 10 years, with the Dodgers. He played first base during his first season, but for most of his Dodger career he was their second baseman. During Robinson’s career, the Dodgers went to the World Series six times; they beat the Yankees to win the 1955 World Series.

 Robinson was chosen to play on six consecutive National League All-Star teams. In 1962, he became the first black player inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

 At the end of the 1956 season, the Dodgers chose to sell Robinson's contract to the New York Giants. Instead of playing for the Giants, Robinson decided to retire. He was 37 years old.

 Robinson made his final public appearance at a World Series game on October 14, 1972. By that time, he was in failing health. He suffered from diabetes and heart problems, and he was virtually blind. He died 10 days later at age 53.

 Robinson had hoped to live to see the day when a black man would manage a major-league baseball team. Two years after his death, the Cleveland Indians hired the first black manager. At the press conference that announced the appointment of Frank Robinson (no relation to Jackie) as the manager, Frank Robinson made a special point of saying how much he wished Jackie Robinson had lived to see the moment.

 Today, Jackie Robinson’s wife, Rachel, heads the Jackie Robinson Foundation, which provides scholarships to help minority students attend college. Since the Foundation’s inception, more than 1,100 students have received scholarships.  
http://www.americaslibrary.gov/assets/common/trans.gif